

From: Frank P. Miles
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 12/10/01 12:53am
Subject: Microsoft settlement

Dear Sir/Madam:

It is my hope that some modification of the proposed Microsoft settlement might occur. While this citizen has no direct financial stake in the outcome of this case, as a user of legally developed Free Software -- which must interoperate with Microsoft software -- my ability to do my work will be affected by this settlement.

I am not personally very concerned with Microsoft's continual expansion of what it considers as the role of an operating system. However, in my work I share documents regularly with others who use Microsoft Office applications, and through computer networks which include systems running Microsoft Windows operating systems. In the past engineers and programmers have laboriously (and legally) reverse-engineered Microsoft file formats, communication protocols, and program APIs in order to achieve interoperability. This has been done for both commercial and non-commercial software development. One consistent Microsoft tactic has been to continually change these structures, presumably to make it more difficult for competing products to offer interoperability.

As has been widely noted, the Free Software operating system "Linux" appears to be the strongest competitor to Microsoft. However the proposed Microsoft settlement appears to strengthen Microsoft's ability to continue to use its ability to change its structures, weakening its most important competitor. This is clearly the opposite of the intended result. New initiatives from Microsoft, particularly some of the networking changes anticipated with its ".NET" strategy, may accelerate the dominance of Microsoft further into the Internet.

Since Microsoft has become the standard in the industry (at least in part through illegal and anti-competitive means) then they should provide enough information to all others to ensure interoperability. Microsoft must be compelled to make the communication protocols, system APIs, and document file formats freely available prior to the sale of any product. This would not prevent Microsoft from developing new products, or expanding or improving existing products. This would not degrade computer security, as "security through obscurity" mostly obscures a products' weaknesses to a legitimate customer (see, for example, the work of Bruce Schneier).

I and others who are interested in Free Software (and in commercial software from non-Microsoft sources) look forward to appropriate changes in section III(D),(E), and (J).

Thank you for your attention in this important matter.

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